Edgar Allan Poe

joy to the lovers of this verse. unique American poet. It is in seventeen small and daintfly bound volumes, inclosed in a case, and illustrated with various portraits of the poet, his wife, and his relatives and is the result of irresistible impulse, not friends. It contains, besides the complete works of Poe in prose and poetry, newspaper letters and private corre nce, and many more or less in teresting documents never before



The Hulling Portrait.

printed. There is a biography, an autobiographical sketch, and an appreciative essay on "Poe's Place in American Literature," by Hamilton Wright Mabie, besides bibliography and index. In a word, it is a most complete little set of books.

It is hardly exact to compare Poe to comparison is almost inevitable. He recognize the irregular meter, the perhad, perhaps, more in common with fection of sound, the spontaneity of feel-Keats in his love of pure sound and ing, the daring imagination, as characmelody, and the almost sensuous imagery of some of his poems, but neither English writer has approached him in fiction, and even Hawthorne, his contemporary in the world of weird imagination, does not rival him in his own peculiar field. The weird tales of Hawthorne are apart, impersonal, and remote; they do not affect us personally; but in "The Gold Bug," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and others of Poe's grewsome fancies, the reader seems to be himself taking part in the The fact is that Poe was a figure alone and to some extent epoch-making, in American literature. He was the first to depart from the models of the older world, and strike out a form of his own, which was neither grotesque, crude, nor feeble, but of an exquisite, if fragmentary, perfection. He was the man who caught glimpses of a world of thought into which some poet of the New World, in a future age, will enter in full pos-

The genius of Poe is so separated from that of the Massachusetts school of poets, the only other literary group of the age, that he is almost never even mentioned in connection with them. For this reason, and also because he teristics of true American poetry, and wrote little of a really popular charac- will do the things of which Poe only ter, his name has not been any such dreamed. Even now one poet-Lanierhousehold word as that of Longfellow or has brought one kind of verse to per- explicable. He remains the most sharp-Whittier. Although not a Virginian by fection, working along Poe's lines, and ly defined personality in our literary birth or ancestry, his associations were these lines have also been followed by history. His verse and his imaginative almost all with the old South during the James Whitcomb Riley in the Middle prose stand out in bold relief against formative period of his life; he is often West, and by Edwin Markham in Caliclaimed as a Virginian poet, and his forms. Poe is the dean of them all, and nor interprets them. One may go furpoetry has many of the characteristics of the greater genius yet to come. One ther, and affirm that both verse and of the literary thought of that section of wonders whether Marlowe was not prose have a place by themselves in the the country, and much in common with proud of Shakespeare. But it is a parathat of its later representative, Sidney dox that the work of which a man is Lanier. While the irregularity of not proud is often that which is most Lanier's metrical style was probably due valuable to the world.



Illustration from "Hans Pfaal."

in part to the fact that he was a mustcian before he was a poet, it is also due, in all probability, to a certain spontaneity of impulse which has caused the the Middle West, to cut loose from the as irregular, and, at its best, as charm-

has appeared, and will be a from the hindrances of a set form of

In fact, perhaps the great charm, as the work of Poe is that it is not labored or finished. Whatever in it is good nation. For the first time in the New human speech; it lies on his work as of long care and polishing. Not even in poems of such smooth and regular meter as "The Raven" is there evidence of careful work, for the simplicity of the meter would insure the ease of writing in it after the first few stanzas. In other poems of more complicated form

effects have been secured by repetition, not consciously, perhaps-Poe was no trickster in words-but from the instinctive feeling that it was better to repeat the line than to spoil either sound or sense. With a formal meter like the hexameter, or with a set form like that of the sonnet, Poe could have done little. He would have been hampered, vexed, and uneasy. His genius demanded freedom of form, of language, of imagination, of conditions; and much of the imperfection of his work arose from his inability to secure an environment where he might work without daily care and harassment. With an independent income, a position which would have brought him friends, but not overburdening duties, and congenial society. Poe might have written the greatest poems in American literature. As it was, he has left us fragments of genius, and singers of the South and Middle West, the weirdness of his thought, which they could not imitate. But, nevertheless. they have kept the path which he blazed from being lost or overgrown, and some



Virginia, Wife of Edgar Allan Poe.

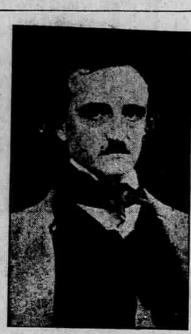
At any rate, there is to be a Poe re vival during the present season, and this daemonic holds a first place. It is the new edition of the poet's works is early on the ground. It is appreciatively edited, and the new matter which it contains cannot fail to be interesting. There are passages in Mr. Mabie's essay on Poe which have almost a ring of prophecy.

One of them is as follows: "One fact about our literature has not received adequate attention—the fact that it had no childhood. In its beginning it was the record of a people who had long passed the age of play and dreams, and were given over to pressing and exacting work. We are a young nation, but an old people, and our books, as distinguished from English books, are the products of a mature people in a new world. The world in which books are written has much to do with their quality, their themes, and their form; but the substance of the books of power is the deposit of experience in the hearts and minds of a race. In American literature we have a fresh field and an old race; we have new conditions, and an experience which antedates them. We were educated in the Old World, and a man carries his education with him. He cannot escape it, and would lose incal-

"The kind of originality which inheres poets of the South, and later those of in a new race and runs into novel forms we do not and shall not possess; the nius-the quality which lies beyond the older models of verse and adopt a form kind of originality which issues out of reach of the most exacting and intellithe direct and hand-to-hand dealing gent work, as it lies beyond the search ing, as the song of a bird. The daring with nature and life we may hope to de- of analysis. A trained man may learn freedom of form exhibited in Poe's "The velop on the scale of the Greeks or the the secrets of form; he may become an Bells," which is one of the most admir- English. A great literature must be adept in the skill of the craft; but the able examples of onomatopela in the waited for, and while we are waiting it final felicity of touch, the ultimate language, following absolutely the must- is wise to be hopeful of the future; for grace of effortless power, elude and cal thought of the poet, has its later expectation is often a kind of prophecy, baffle him. Shakespeare is never so counterpart in Lanier's "Symphony," and to believe in the possibility of doing wonderful as in those perfect lines, although Lanier's mind was wholly the best things in the best way is itself those exquisite images and similes. While from a proud tower in the town those fragrant sentences akin with the Death looks gigantically down.

hadowed that of Poe. Henry Tim- ature in this country, to the close of flowers in their freshness, and in their This picture has what one may call sense of humor. This is the opening Again, he says:

feeling and set free the corpid imagi- can .ommand this consummate bloom on



From a Daguerreotype.

helped to lay the foundations of Ameri- World it became easy and natural for can literary thought, and whether he men to sing. Hitherto the imagination himself would have thought so or not, had been invoked to give wings and fire these are worthy achievements. It is to high arguments for the rights of men; extremely doubtful if Foe would have now the imagination began to speak, by enjoyed the fact that lie has been the virtue of its own inward impulse, of the guide followed by more or less crude things of its own life. In religion, in the social consciousness, in publi clife, who felt the charm of his music and there were stirrings of conscience which revealed a deeper life of the spirit among a new people. The age of provincislism, of submission to the judgment and acceptance of the taste of either Keats or Shelley, although the day, perhaps, some young genius will older and more cultivated communities, was coming to an end. . . .

"Poe stood alone among his contemporaries by reason of the fact that while his imagination was fertilized by the movement of the time, his work was not, in theme or sympathy, representative of the forces behind it. The group of gifted men, with whom he had for the most part only casual connections, reflected the age behind them, or the time in which they lived; Poe shared with them the creative impulse without sharing the specific interests and devotions of the period. He was primarily and distinctively the artist of his time: the man who cared for his art, not for he could say through it, but for what it had to say through him. Emerson, Lowell, Holmes, Whittier, Bryant, Irving, and, in certain aspects of his genius, Hawthorne, might have been predicted; reading our early history in the light of our later development, their coming seems to have been foreordained by the conditions of life on the new continent; and, later, Whitman and Lanier stand for and are bound up in the fortunes of the New World, and its new order of political and social life. Poe alone, among men of his eminence, could not have been foreseen

"This fact suggests his limitations but it also brings into clear view the the originality of his work. His contemporaries are explicable; Poe is ina background_which neither suggests

But after all, Mr. Mabie touches the secret of Poe's charm when he says: "Among the elements which go to the making of the true work of art, the

literature of the world."



Illustration from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

was another Southern poet who used this century, is the product of an old purity with waters which carry the stars a sort of matter-of-fact weirdness about paragraph of the essay on furniture: the irregular meter in his nature poems race is not to charge it with lack of in their depths, which light comedy and it, as of the work of a poet who, while

it lies on the fields, because the creative spirit has passed that way. It came again and again to Wordsworth during fifteen marvelous creative years; and when it passed it left him cold and mechanical. It is the pure spirit of art moving like the wind where it listeth. and, like the wind, dying into silence again. This magic is in Poe, and its record remains, and will remain, one of our most precious literary possessions. The bulk of the work upon which it rests is not great; its ethical significance is not always evident; it is not representative after the manner of the great masters of poetry; but its quality is perfect. The importance of half a dozen perfect poems is not to be discovered in their mass; it lies in the revelation of the imagination which shines in and from them. Among a practical people, dealing with the external relations of men, and largely absorbed in the work of the hands, the sudden flashing of the 'light that never was on sea or land' was a spiritual event of high significance. That men do not live by bread alone is the common message of religion and of art. That message was delivered by Poe with marvelous distinctness of speech. That he knew what he wanted to say, and that he deliberately and patiently sought the best way of saying it, is clear enough; it neither adds to nor detracts from the artistic value of what he did that he knew what he wanted to do. The essential fact about him and his work is, that he was possessed by the passion for beauty for its own sake, and that at his best he had access to the region of pure ideality."

This last sentence is an exact appre ciation of Poe's work. It ranks him with the pure idealists, where he unquestionably belongs. There was no taint of commercialism in his work, as, idle, vagabondish man of letters which Perhaps he thought that his countrymen



Sarah Helen Whitman.

unique individuality of his genius and porary writers who were less idealistic. It was not an age of commercialism. Curiously enough, this crept into our literature after the great struggle which brought out the best and the worst of national characteristics. Perhaps it was that the ante-bellum literary spirit was too vigorous to permit such a taint without detection; perhaps the wave of French influence which swept over the country had something to do with it; but, at any rate, the soul of the earlier American school was clean and unbribed. The same was true of many of the Victorian writers in England, where, probably, the influence of the Queen had swayed popular taste, and where, moreover, the violent reaction from the common morals of the Georges had led to a prejudice in favor of clean living, which naturally led to other such bourgeois virtues as conscientiousness and earnestness.

But the quality which distinguished Poe's work is precisely that which Kipling was defining in his latest story, 'Wireless," when he said:

"Remember that in all the millions permitted there are but five little lines of which one may say, These are the Magic. These are the Vision. The rest s only poetry."

The five lines to which he refers are from two different poems. Two of them are found in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," and have been called by Rossetti "the Pillars of Hercules of human

Magic casements opening on the foam Of perflous seas, in facry lands forlorn, The other three are from Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan," whose weird origin is erhaps as nearly supernatural as any

thing in literature is:

savage place as holy and enchanted er beneath a waning moon was hau woman wailing for her demon lover. It is impossible for anyone familiar with Poe not to see that the same mysterious, indefinable quality which exists in these lines is to be found in his work. though seldom, of course, in so perfect a form. Take, for example, these lines "The City in the Sea," a poem scarcely known at all:

Lo! Death has reared himself a threne In a strange city lying alone Far down within the dim West Where the good and the bad and the worst an Have gone to their eternal rest. There shrines and palaces and towers (Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)

the "Virginia Edition" of the complete works of Edgar Allan Poe plete works of Edgar Allan Poe plete works of Edgar Allan Poe superior musical effect and freedom plain some of its characteristics."

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The work of Edgar Allan Poe superior musical effect and freedom plain some of its characteristics." magic, this divine ease in doing the most the effect upon others. It is not alto- Italians have but little sentiment be-"To the men who were young between difficult things, is the exclusive property gether a new idea, since the legend of yound marbles and colors. In France, me-1830 and 1840, there was something in of the man of genius, and is his only the city sunk in the sea is one used by liora probant, deteriora sequentur, the well as the strongest characteristic of the air which broke up the deeps of in his most fortunate hours. No man Heinrich Heine and other German writ- people are too much a race of grd-

ers, but the treatment is utterly new.



From Portrait by Samuel S. Osgood.

of it, that a man who has left so strong en impression as Poe upon our literature should be represented by a volume of poems so thin as to be easily read through in half an hour; but so it is. Even his fiction is not voluminous, but every line of it is instinct with individuality. The same is true even of his be to many readers the most fascinating part of the present edition of his works. The editors have patiently ferreted out of old files all that they could find of his newspaper letters and essays, and his the result is a proof that he was not the indeed, there was not in that of contem- he has sometimes been represented, but a fairly hard-working and steady-minded person. It is also pathetic proof of the sort of hack work to which he was reduced to keep soul and body together. and it is possible that, without anyone's realizing the fact, he left his stamp on the embryonic newspaper and magazine world of this country quite as distinctly as on the world of literature. He wrote on all sorts of subjects, congenial and urcongenial, bringing the keen edge o: his intellect to bear on them all. The makers of current literature in America have always, of necessity, gone on the principle enunciated by Sir Jimmy Havikins, "If one must use razors to cut grindstones. I prefer the best quality," and numerous keen and brilliant minds have been diterally used up in the mak-

> It is only within the last quarter of a century that an American newspaper man has had much chance of being anything but a creative newspaper genius. It took his time, his brains, his ideas, to build up the insatiable future. The impersonality of the American press was now disappearing. Even the magazines were long anonymous receptacles. As late as the seventies the contributors to that they had begun to be original, and Harper's and the "Atlantic" signed their this is quite true. names seldom, if ever, and the new era began about the time of J. G. Holland's we have Poe, in the company of other newspaper and magazine hacks, now for elzel's Chess-Player," "Secret Writing," 'Anastatic Printing," "The Nebular Hypothesis," and one of Longfellow's poems. He would, in fact, be called at newspaper man, and might be set at almost anything from special war cor- I wrote it, if it circulate at all." respondence to writing soap advertisements. That this versatility and thor-

ing of the American press.



Illustration from "Words With Mummy."

oughness-for even the back articles are well done-should have co-existed with dant curling hair confined in the quaint the rare perception and power of ex- bonnet of a hundred years ago, and pression shown in the poems and tales, must prove to the most casual mind how great a man Poe really was, and in an Empire robe of faint, flowered dehow far, by careless critics, he has been sign, the tiny but rounded neck and written because needs must, that we get

pears what is never found, except in a who was to be the mother of the mest livion the editor, Mr. James A. Harrisaturnine phase, in more serious work of elfish, the most unearthly of poets, son, has done the

"In the internal decoration, if not in

abouts to maintain those housenold pre-It is strange, when one comes to think prieties of which, indeed, they 'ave at delicate appreciation, or, at least, the elements of a proper sense. The Cninese and most of the Eastern races have a warm but inappropriate fancy. The Scotch are poor decorists. The Dutch have, perhaps, an indeterminate idea that a curtain is not a cabbage. In Spain they are all curtains-a nation of hangmen. The Russians do not furnish. The Hottentots and Kickapoos are all very well in their way. The Yankees alone are preposterous."

This thing appeared in "Burton's Gentleman's Magazine," 1840, and in the Broadway Journal," 1, 18. It may be imagined that it did not tend to scothe the artistic taste of a young people just falling in love with haircloth and kerosene and air-tight stones, and trying to reconcile beauty with convenience and small incomes. Moreover, the unqualified endorsement of England must have caused the American Eagle, then a comparatively young bird, to ruffle his feathers and utter a warning cry. But since the days when genius was reduced to writing on curtains and astral lamps we have learned that England, of all nations, has made a study of home decoration and comfort, and that many of our modern improvements of which we were so proud must go to the junk dealer, to be replaced either by ancient heirlooms or solid and simple homely furnishings. Poe was a misplaced authority on domestic art, but his instincts were right. The hint which he throws out that the oriental fancy is newspaper work, which will doubthess "warm but inappropriate" suggests that by some fairy godmother." he may have somehow foreseen the time when, in a blind craze for warmth of color, women would huddle fans, parasols, mats, curtains, and vases into a room where they were never meant to casual contributions to magazines, and be, and arrange them in a way which would make a well-bred Japanese faint.



coeval with its existence, and is only Elizabeth Poe, Mother of Edgar A. Poe. pricked the spangled bubbles that then

were likely to do almost anything now

The biography of Poe, which occupies a volume by itself, contains more ineditorship of the old "Scribner's." Hence formation which will tend to throw new light on the character of the poet. It is accompanied by an "Editor's Prefon "The Philosophy of Furniture," "Ma- acter of the present edition is explained. Mr. Harrison says in part:

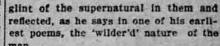
"The present edition of Poe is based deemed fundamental in any reissue of what I have written should circulate as

"This pregnant sentence-from the preface to the 1845 edition of the poems -has been constantly kept in mind by the editor during the preparation of this work, and no pains have been spared to apply it practically,

"After a thorough examination of all the existing editions of Poe's works, the editor became convinced that no satisfactory text of the poet's writings could be established without direct study of the original sources in which these writings first and last appeared. Existing editions conflicted in so many points that no course was left except to reject them all-beginning with Griswold, whom all had more or less faithfully followed-and extract a new and absolutely authentic text from the magazines. periodicals, and books of tales and poems which Poe himself had edited or to which he had contributed. . . . The style of this biography is most charming in certain passages. Here, for example, is a comment on Poe's ances-

Elizabeth Arnold (for such was her maiden name) without seeing in it foreshadowings of those ethereal Eleonoras and Ligeias that haunted the poet's ties, their Indian-summer-like vagueness; the childlike figure, the great, wide-open, mysterious eyes, the abunshadowing the brow in raven masses, the thus describes, and, indeed, in the light high waist and attenuated arms clasped of later thought, this appears to be shoulders, the head proudly erect. It is the real personality of Poc, in pla the author, and that is evidence of a whose luminous dark gray eyes had a York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.)

"No one can look at the portrait of



"Rich currents of Irish, Scotch, English and American blood ran together in his palpitating veins and produced a psychic blend unlike that of any other American poet: Celtic mysticism, Irish fervor, Scotch melody, the iris-tipped fantasy of the Shelleys and the Coleridges, and the independence and alertness of the transatlantic American, into whom all these Old World characteris-



Zolnay's Bust of Poe.

tics had been born, on whom all these treasures of music and imagination, of passion and mystery had been bestowed

There are some racy reminiscences of Poe's college days, which shed some rays of comedy over an existence which was in the main tragic, not to say pathetic, in its struggles and deprivations. One grotesque function in which the young poet student took part was the eating of one of the West Point professors in effigy, the effigy being an anclent gander. This tale is told by a schoolmate, Mr. T. H. Gibson,

Later there are some fascinating glimpses of early American Bohemia in the account of the beginnings of "Graham's Magazine" and the "Broadway Journal." Of Poe at this period the hiographer save:

"Conscience is an awkward ingredient to mingle with things. The conscientious man is always a terror to the community. Let it be known that a exercise it, that neither fear nor favor will intimidate him from his sense of duty to himself and to that community, and instantly such a man becomes a bugbear, a scarecrow, an offense, and a scourge to the evil-doer and the uncon-

"When he settled in New York for the

second time in April, 1844. Poe had become this incarnation of the literary conscience of the time. From the moment he had reviewed 'Norman Leslie' in the 'Southern Literary Messenger,' and danced before the public eye, down to the date of his departure for Philadelphia, the critical instinct-the literary conscience-had been growing in him with vast strides. 'I have sometimes amused myself,' he says in 'Marginalia,' 'by endeavoring to fancy what would be the fate of an individual gifted, or rather accursed, with an intellect very far suthe most part forgotten, writing essays ace," in which the purpose and char- perior to that of his race. Of course he would be conscious of his own superiority; nor could he (if otherwise constituted as man is) help manifesting his on the poet's own statement of what he consciousness. Thus he would make himself enemies at all points. And since his the present time a very good all-round his works: 'I am naturally anxious that opinions and speculations would widely



Illustrations from "A. Gordon Pvm."

differ from those of all mankind-that he would be considered a madman, is evident. How herribly painful such a condreams with their delicate impalpabili- dition! Hell could invent no greater torture than that of a being charged with abnormal weakness on account of being abnormally strong."

The biographer goes on to say that at this period of his life Poe was not unlike the imaginary being whom he

It is in these informal productions. In some of this newspaper work ap- the face of an elf, a sprite, an Undine, the somewhat shadowy and spook-like